PIJSSL

Praxis International Journal of Social Science and Literature

A Peer-reviewed Multidisciplinary e-Journal with SJIR 2025 = 6.034 & ISSN: 2581-6675

Vol. 09, No. 04 (April 2026) **DOI:** 10.51879/PIJSSL/090414

Email: editor.pijssl@gmail.com | **Website:** www.pijssl.com

OPEN ACCESS

Afropolitanism and Gendered Migrant Identities in Sefi Atta's *A Bit of Difference*

Dr. Sudeshna Pandey [1], **Dr. Payal Mukherjee** [2]

[1,2] Assistant Professor, Department of Humanities, BNM Institute of Technology. Bangalore, India.

Corresponding Author: ***Dr. Sudeshna Pandey*** *(Email: onlinesudeshna04@gmail.com)*

Abstract

The present study explores the intersection of Afropolitanism and gendered migrant identities in Sefi Atta's novel, "A Bit of Difference." Afropolitanism is a contemporary cultural phenomenon that highlights the complex experiences of individuals of African descent who navigate multiple cultural spaces and identities. This study focuses on the portrayal of gendered migrant identities in Atta's novel, examining how the protagonist's experience as a Nigerian woman living in Nigeria and the United States shapes her understanding of self and her place in the world. The protagonist, Deola Bello, embodies the challenges and aspirations of the Afropolitan woman. Through her eyes, Atta delves into the intricacies of being a professional, educated woman from a patriarchal society who confronts the complexities of migration, cultural hybridity, and gender expectations. Atta addresses issues such as the impact of migration on familial relationships, the challenges faced by women in male-dominated spaces, and the tension between tradition and modernity. The study employs a combination of postcolonial and feminist literary theories to analyze the themes of identity, migration, and gender in "A Bit of Difference." By examining the novel's narrative structure, character development, and cultural references, the findings of this study contribute to a broader understanding of how literature reflects and engages with contemporary socio-cultural dynamics.

Keywords: *Afropolitanism, Sefi Atta, Protagonist, Feminism, Migration, Woman.*

Introduction

In the contemporary literary landscape, Afropolitanism has emerged as a powerful lens through which to examine the experiences of individuals of African descent navigating diverse cultural spaces. Sefi Atta's novel, A Bit of Difference, explores Afropolitanism and its intersection with gendered migrant identities. This article delves into the themes and complexities presented in the novel, shedding light on the ways in which Atta examines the multifaceted nature of identity, migration, and gender.

Afropolitanism, a term coined by Taiye Selasi, captures the experiences of individuals who embody a transnational consciousness and navigate diverse cultural environments. It emphasizes the complex intersections of African and global identities. Atta's A Bit of Difference delves into the nuances of Afropolitanism, highlighting the tension between cultural heritage and globalized aspirations. Migration, particularly for women, often brings about unique challenges related to gender roles, expectations, and the negotiation of cultural norms. Atta's protagonist, Deola Bello, represents the complexities faced by gendered migrants. As a Nigerian woman living in Nigeria and the United States, Deola grapples with her African heritage's demands and the globalized world's opportunities and pressures. A Bit of Difference explores the impact of migration on Deola's identity and relationships. Her experiences highlight the clash between traditional values and modern aspirations. Deola's navigation through male-dominated spaces reflects the

This is an open access article licensed under https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0

struggles faced by many migrant women striving for success and recognition. Atta skillfully depicts the tensions, expectations, and negotiations that shape Deola's gendered migrant identity. Atta's novel also examines the notion of cultural hybridity within the context of Afropolitanism.

Significance of the Study

This research study primarily analyses and portrays the emergence of New Women concerning the protagonists in the novels of Sefi Atta's *A Bit of Difference*. Sefi Atta's women characters are strong evidence of women's rights, freedom, equality, self-respect, and having a powerful voice. Atta speaks out against masculine bigotry and shows her dissatisfaction. Atta desires to treat both sexes equally. Hence, she addresses the issue of patriarchy, gender inequality and tries to bring the new women who fight for their rights and solidarity. The present research explores the emergence of new women analyzing the protagonists in the novels of Sefi Atta which brings a new perspective to literary research and academics. Atta's literary works go beyond traditional depictions of women in Nigerian literature by positioning them as a contemporary feminist voice, with the primary goal of promoting gender equality in contemporary African literature and redefining African women who are no longer traditional women. The research contributes to feminism and gender studies, and African feminism in particular. It widens the literary research perspective of the readers. The objective of the present study is to elucidate the concepts like black feminism, intersectional feminism, radical feminism, and women empowerment and to analyse black women who fought for their rights and struggle for gender and race equality in socioeconomic and political spheres in Africa.

"Afropolitanism" was coined by the writer "Taiye Selasi in her article *Bye Bye Babar* from 2005. She considers herself a *local of Accra, Berlin, New York and Rome* (Selasi, 2015), that is, an Afropolitan:

> They (read: we) are Afropolitans – the newest generation of African emigrants, coming soon or collected at a law firm/chem lab/jazz lounge near you. You'll know us by our funny blend of London fashion, New York jargon, African ethics, and academic successes. Some of us are ethnic mixes, e.g. Ghanaian and Canadian, Nigerian and Swiss; others merely cultural mutts: American accent, European affect, African ethos. Most of us are multilingual: in addition to English and a Romantic or two, we understand some indigenous tongue and speak a few urban vernaculars. There is at least one place on The African Continent to which we tie our sense of self: be it a nation-state (Ethiopia), a city (Ibadan), or an auntie's kitchen. Then there's the G8 city or two (or three) that we know like the backs of our hands, and the various institutions that know us for our famed focus. We are Afropolitans: not citizens, but Africans of the world. (Selasi, 2005).

Postcolonialism: Analyzing Power Dynamics and Cultural Hybridity

In Sefi Atta's novel, post-colonialism emerges as a significant theme that invites readers to critically analyze power dynamics and explore the complexities of cultural hybridity. The novel engages with postcolonial perspectives, highlighting the lasting effects of colonialism and its impact on identity, power relations, and cultural expressions. The novel delves into the power dynamics between the colonizers and the colonized, as well as the lingering effects of colonialism. Atta highlights how power structures established during the colonial era continue to influence Nigeria's social, political, and economic systems. She critiques how power is wielded and reinforces the disparities between those in positions of authority and those who are marginalized.

The novel explores the concept of cultural hybridity, which emerges due to the blending and mixing of diverse cultures. Atta portrays characters who straddle multiple cultural identities, reflecting the complexities of living in a postcolonial context. She examines how cultural hybridity can be enriching and challenging as individuals negotiate their sense of self and belonging in a diverse and ever-evolving world. The novel further investigates the role of language and expression in postcolonial societies. Atta highlights

how language becomes a site of power and control, with English as the colonizers' language. She also explores the complexities of code-switching and its impact on identity formation. The novel interrogates how language can be used to assert or subvert power dynamics.

Gendered Migrant Identities in A Bit of Difference

Gendered migrant identities play a significant role in Sefi Atta's novel, A Bit of Difference. Deola's migrant identity is shaped by the tension between her Nigerian cultural heritage and her experiences in London. She navigates the complexities of straddling multiple cultural spaces, often feeling like an outsider in both contexts. Atta explores the challenges of reconciling cultural expectations and societal norms, highlighting the negotiation of identity that migrant women undertake. Deola faces pressure to conform to traditional gender norms within her Nigerian family and professional life. Atta examines the limitations and societal expectations placed on women, showcasing the complexities of balancing personal desires and aspirations with societal expectations.

The novel explores the quest for agency and autonomy in the lives of migrant women. Deola strives to assert her independence, make decisions, and pursue her career ambitions. Atta emphasizes the importance of agency and the challenges that migrant women face in asserting their autonomy within contexts that may be restrictive or patriarchal. Through exploring gendered migrant identities, Sefi Atta's A Bit of Difference highlights the complexities, challenges, and aspirations of migrant women in a globalized world. The novel examines the negotiation of cultural identity, the impact of gendered expectations, and the pursuit of agency and autonomy. Atta's portrayal of Deola Bello's experiences prompts readers to reflect on the broader issues surrounding gender, migration, and the construction of identity in contemporary society.

Afropolitanism and Hybridity

Sefi Atta's novel, A Bit of Difference, explores the themes of Afropolitanism and hybridity, offering a nuanced perspective on the complex identities and experiences of individuals navigating multiple cultural contexts. The novel investigates the concept of Afropolitanism, which refers to the intersection of African and cosmopolitan identities. The protagonist, Deola Bello, embodies the Afropolitan experience as she straddles her Nigerian heritage and globalized aspirations. Atta explores the challenges and opportunities this dual identity presents, highlighting how Deola negotiates her Nigerian roots with her exposure to diverse cultural influences. The novel explores the notion of cultural hybridity, emphasizing the blending and intersection of various cultural elements. Deola's experiences in London and encounters with different cultures and traditions contribute to forming her hybrid identity. Atta showcases the richness and complexity of cultural hybridity, emphasizing the possibilities for cross-cultural connections and creating new cultural expressions.

Through its exploration of Afropolitanism and hybridity, Sefi Atta's A Bit of Difference provides readers with a nuanced understanding of the intricate intersections of culture, identity, and globalization. The novel celebrates the possibilities and challenges of navigating multiple cultural contexts, inviting readers to reflect on identity formation's fluid and dynamic nature in an increasingly interconnected world.

Power Dynamics and Agency

The novel does not celebrate “Afropolitanism; instead, it constantly thematizes Deola's alienation and unsettledness. While Adichie's Americanah focuses on Western racism and prejudice towards Africans, Atta's novel is much more focused on Nigerian society and the reasons why those who can leave the country:

> How had Nigeria governed itself after independence? Two failed attempts at civilian governments, a four-year civil war and God knows how many military regimes in between. [...] All we have is oil money circulating in our economy. The whole banking sector is running on laundered money. The whole of Nigeria is. *(Atta, 2013, pp. 55, 73)*

The novel is very critical of the overall lack of social conscience and empathy towards other people in Nigeria, as well as of corruption at the highest levels of government. Migration to the West is seen as exacerbating socioeconomic differences that already exist in Nigeria. The illiterate Nigerians are referred to as "*bush*," whereas the expats with British educations who "*speak phonetics*" (p. 171) consider themselves as the elite of the nation or "*oyinbo*," which means "*white*" in Nigerian Pidgin. Deola considers these educational stratifications the "*colonial hangovers*" of imperialism (p. 171). She offers an exact opinion on why Nigerians cannot create a functioning society—because there is no solidarity among citizens:

> Nigerians are as prejudiced as the English, and more snobbish. Nigerians, given any excuse, are ready to snub. Without provocation and even remorse. They snub one another, snub other Africans, other blacks and other races. Nigerians would snub aliens if they encountered them. […] Nigerians constantly rank each other according to health, education and formation, with ambiguous results: this one is bush, that one is oyinbo. *(pp. 43, 99)*

Gendered Migrant Experiences in Male-dominated Spaces

Atta highlights the challenges and complexities women like Deola face as they navigate these spaces, shedding light on issues of power, agency, and gender inequality. Deola works in a male-dominated industry as a financial analyst, where she faces gendered barriers and prejudices. Atta portrays women's systemic challenges in such environments, including unequal opportunities, lack of recognition, and limited access to professional networks. Deola's experiences reflect the struggles of many migrant women who must navigate discriminatory practices and biases to succeed in their careers.

The novel explores the power dynamics inherent in male-dominated spaces and how women navigate them. Deola confronts the need to assert herself and establish her expertise in the face of skepticism and dismissive attitudes from her male colleagues. Atta delves into the complexities of negotiating power, asserting agency, and challenging gender norms within these environments. Deola faces expectations to conform to traditional gender roles and expectations, even within her professional life. She encounters resistance and pushback when challenging societal norms and asserting her independence and authority. Atta highlights the pressures placed on women in male-dominated spaces to conform to gendered expectations, often at the expense of their individuality and ambitions.

Challenges and Aspirations of the Afropolitan Woman

In Sefi Atta's novel, A Bit of Difference, the challenges and aspirations of the Afropolitan woman are explored through the experiences of the protagonist, Deola Bello. Deola's character embodies the complexities women face who navigate multiple cultural spaces and strive for personal and professional fulfillment. Atta presents a nuanced portrayal of the aspirations and struggles of the Afropolitan woman, highlighting the following key themes:

- *Balancing Tradition and Modernity*: Deola faces reconciling traditional values and societal expectations with her aspirations for a modern, cosmopolitan lifestyle. As an educated and independent woman, she seeks to challenge societal norms and expectations that confine women to traditional roles.
- *Negotiating Family and Career*: Deola's pursuit of a successful career in a male-dominated industry creates tension within her family.
- *Identity and Belonging*: Deola's experiences as an Afropolitan woman living in Nigeria and the United States highlight the struggle to find a sense of belonging and identity.
- *Independence and Autonomy*: A central aspiration of the Afropolitan woman in the novel is the desire for independence and autonomy. Deola strives to make choices and decisions, challenging traditional gender roles and societal expectations.
- *Challenging Patriarchy and Gender Norms*: Atta confronts the patriarchal structures that permeate

Nigerian society and explores how they limit women's opportunities and agency. Atta's novel provides a rich and thought-provoking depiction of the multifaceted experiences of Afropolitan women as they navigate their identities, careers, and relationships in a rapidly changing world.

Deconstructing Gender Norms and Reclaiming Agency

The deconstruction of gender norms and the reclamation of agency are central themes explored through the protagonist, Deola Bello. Atta challenges traditional gender expectations and empowers female characters to assert their autonomy, challenge societal constraints, and redefine their roles. Atta questions and subverts conventional gender norms throughout the narrative. Deola defies expectations by pursuing a successful career, prioritizing her desires, and challenging traditional gender roles. Atta challenges the notion that women should conform to predetermined roles and demonstrates the transformative power of defying societal expectations. It challenges the idea that femininity is synonymous with passivity or subordination. Deola embodies a new kind of assertive, independent, and unapologetic femininity. Atta portrays her female characters as complex individuals who defy traditional expectations of being a woman, emphasizing the importance of embracing individuality and personal agency.

Sefi Atta's *A Bit Of Difference*: A critical Overview

Sefi Atta's novel, A Bit of Difference, published in 2013, offers a compelling exploration of Afropolitanism and gendered migrant identities. The novel follows the life of Deola Bello, a Nigerian woman in her late thirties who works as a London-based financial analyst. Deola returns to Nigeria to visit her family and experiences a series of encounters and events that challenge her understanding of self, her cultural identity, and her place in the world. Atta's A Bit of Difference has garnered critical acclaim for its thought-provoking examination of migration, identity, gender, and cultural hybridity. The novel provides readers with a nuanced portrayal of the complexities individuals face navigating multiple cultural spaces and identities. One prominent theme in the novel is the exploration of Afropolitanism. Atta captures the essence of Afropolitanism by presenting Deola as a cosmopolitan individual who straddles multiple cultural spheres. Deola's experiences reflect the tensions and negotiations inherent in an interconnected world, where her Nigerian heritage intersects with her globalized aspirations. Atta's depiction of Deola's character highlights the challenges and opportunities of living in a transnational space. *A Bit of Difference* also delves into the gendered aspects of migration. Atta presents Deola as a woman grappling with societal expectations, cultural norms, and the pressures of balancing personal desires with familial obligations. Through Deola's experiences, Atta sheds light on the gendered challenges faced by migrant women, including issues of agency, autonomy, and the negotiation of gender roles.

Conclusion

Sefi Atta's *A Bit of Difference* provides a thought-provoking exploration of Afropolitanism and gendered migrant identities. Through the experiences of the protagonist, Deola Bello, the novel examines the complexities and challenges faced by African women navigating multiple cultural spaces. Atta's nuanced portrayal highlights the negotiation of identity, the clash of traditional and modern values, and the empowerment of the Afropolitan woman. By engaging with these themes, Atta contributes to a broader understanding of the diverse experiences and realities of individuals navigating migration, gender, and cultural hybridity in our interconnected world.

The research has noticed that the protagonist of Sefi Atta is a Nigerian woman from a patriarchal family who has undergone the journey towards self-realization and becomes New Woman. It has been noticed that Nigerian women struggled for their rights in a complex post-colonial socio-political environment that supported patriarchal dominance. The research has examined the enhanced female characters designated New Women in post-colonial Nigeria. Atta's protagonist Deola from *A Bit of Difference*, emerges as New Woman.

The study also examines the female protagonists, who are growing aware of the need to make deliberate efforts to improve their lives. It has been observed that the women were driven to implement societal reforms to enhance their socio-political situation, according to the findings. Atta's traits highlight how they interact to produce extraordinary women. Atta's protagonist Deola helps African women through foreign NGOs for the cause of better health of Africans.

The present research has explored the emergence of New Women analyzing the protagonists in the Sefi Atta novel, bringing a new perspective to literary research and academics. Atta's women protagonists at the end have been examined as confident, highly educated, nationalist, open-minded, independent, and assertive women in contemporary society and emerge as New Women. Moreover, Atta has portrayed most of the female characters as sincere, believing in equality, self-respected, determined, painstaking, and fearless women with a radiant and charismatic personalities emerging as New Women. Atta created protagonists that have suffered in their family, personal and professional lives. However, they ultimately want to be self-sufficient, assertive, and confident to oppose patriarchal dominance, racism, and gender discrimination. The study raises awareness among academicians and people in general about the unfairness and exploitation of black women based on race, gender, and religion. Academicians should incorporate the critical assets of the emergence of New Women into the curriculum to instill essential human values through education.

References

1. Atta, Sefi. *A Bit of Difference.* Northampton, MA: Interlink Books, 2013. Print.
2. Balakrishnan, S. *Pan-African legacies, Afropolitan futures: A conversation with Achille Mbembe*. Transition, 2016. Print
3. Bourdieu, P. *The field of cultural production: Essays on art and literature*. R. Johnson (Ed.). New York: Columbia UP, 1993. Print.
4. Brouillette, S. *Postcolonial writers in the global literary marketplace*. Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave, 2007. Print.
5. Dabiri, E. "Why I am (still) not an Afropolitan." *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 28(1) (2016), 104-108. Print.
6. Eze, C. *Postcolonial imagination and moral representations in African literature and culture*. Plymouth: Lexington Books. 2011. Print.
7. Eze, C. "Rethinking African culture and identity: The Afropolitan model." *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, 26(2), (2014) 234–247. Print.
8. Eze, C. "We, Afropolitans." *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, 28(1), (2015). 114-119. Print.
9. Fasselt, R. "I'm not Afropolitan — I'm of the Continent": A Conversation with Yewande Omotoso. Journal of Commonwealth Literature, 50(2), (2015). 231-246. Print.
10. Griswold, W. *Bearing witness: Readers, writers and the novel in Nigeria*. Princeton: Princeton UP. 2000. Print.
11. Huggan, G. *The postcolonial exotic: Marketing the margins*. London: Routledge. 2001. Print.
12. Mbembe, A. The banality of power and the aesthetics of vulgarity in the post-colony. Public Culture, 4 (2), 1-30. 1992.
13. Pahl, M. "Afropolitanism as critical consciousness: Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's and Teju Cole's Internet presence." *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, 28(1), (2016). 73-87. Print.
14. Santana, S. B. "Exorcizing the future: Afropolitanism's spectral origins." *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, 28(1), (2016). 120-126. Print.
15. Selasi, T. "Bye Bye Babar." *The LIP Magazine*, March 3. (2005). Retrieved May 5, 2023, from http://thelip.robertsharp.co.uk/?p=76
16. Selasi, T. Don't ask where I'm from, ask where I'm a local. TED speech, Sept. 29. (2015). Retrieved May 5, 2023, from https://www.ted.com/talks/taiye_selasi_don_t_ask_where_i_m_from_ask_where_i_m_a_local/transcript?language=en